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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

Program Aid  
Number 1682

# Take Care of Our Horses

## Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter



**TRANSPORT HORSES  
HUMANELY**

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NATIONAL ANIMAL  
INDUSTRY CENTER  
USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), has established regulations for the commercial transportation of equines for slaughter. This action fulfills APHIS' responsibility under the 1996 farm bill to regulate the commercial transportation of horses for slaughter within the United States. The language was included in the bill after Congress determined that horses being transported to slaughter have unique and special needs. The intent of this leaflet is to focus on those sections of the regulations that will affect you, the owner or shipper.

## The Regulations

These regulations establish minimum standards to ensure the humane treatment of horses by requiring the owner or shipper to take certain precautions in loading and transporting them for slaughter. The owner or shipper must also ensure that all vehicles used for commercial transportation of horses for slaughter meet specific requirements.

The use of commercial vehicles considered unsuitable to carry equines is prohibited as is the use of electric prods. The final rule on humane transport of horses to slaughter was published in the *Federal Register* (Docket No. 98-074-2) on December 7, 2001. Five years from that date, the use of double-deck trailers will be prohibited. This rule also stipulates that food, water, and rest must be provided for each animal prior to shipment to the slaughter plant.

## Scope of the Rule

The rule governs how equines must be commercially transported to slaughter and affects not only the owner or shipper of the horses but also the vehicle driver. The rule covers what must be done prior to the actual transport from the sale barn or feedlot in terms of feeding and watering the animals. It deals with segregation of the animals (e.g., stallions and aggressive mares who kick and bite other, less aggressive animals) as well as the amount of time an equine can be confined without food and water. The rule also covers certain documents that must be issued before the journey begins and what happens when the delivery is made at the slaughtering plant. Finally, the rule addresses civil penalties for failure to comply with the regulations.

## Requirements for Transport

Prior to the commercial transportation of horses to a slaughtering facility, the owner or shipper must:

- Give each horse an opportunity to eat and drink for a period of not less than 6 consecutive hours immediately before loading the animal in the vehicle.
- Apply a USDA backtag to each horse in the shipment with a bar code and a production date. (Backtags are available at recognized slaughtering establishments or from APHIS personnel.)
- Complete and sign an owner/shipper certificate that includes the name, address, and phone number of the shipper and receiver (slaughter plant) and the transporting vehicle's license and registration number.

- Certify that each horse is able to bear weight on all four limbs, is not blind in both eyes, is able to walk unassisted, is not a mare that is likely to foal during the trip, is older than 6 months, and has had access to food, water, and rest for 6 consecutive hours before being loaded into a vehicle.
- Document identifying marks (brands, tattoos, scars, etc.).
- Document breed, color, and sex.
- Document any preexisting condition of the animal prior to shipment to prove the condition did not occur during transport.

Falsification of any certificate or document is a criminal offense and may result in a fine of up to \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than 5 years, or both.

### **Requirements at the Slaughter Plant**

The driver must not leave the slaughter plant premises until the equines have been examined by a USDA representative. If the driver arrives at the plant outside of regular business hours, he or she can leave the premises but must return to meet the USDA representative during regular business hours. For example, if the truck arrives on Sunday night, the driver must return Monday morning to meet a USDA inspector and provide the signed owner/shipper certificate(s). The Government inspector will collect each certificate, examine each equine, and match the certificate(s) with the equine and its backtag.



## **Special Circumstances**

In the event a horse becomes incapable of walking en route, the owner or shipper must have the animal euthanized by an equine veterinarian. If a horse dies en route, the owner or shipper must contact the nearest APHIS office as soon as possible. If a Federal veterinarian is not available, the owner or shipper should contact an equine veterinarian in that vicinity.

## **Delivery Outside the United States, e.g., Canada**

Canadian inspectors at the border will examine each owner/shipper certificate. However, the document will be provided at the slaughter plant only to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency representative. If there are any discrepancies between a particular horse and the information about it on the certificate, the discrepancies will be noted and the animal will be returned to USDA for followup.

## **Civil Penalty**

Initial violation of the final rule is subject to a fine of up to \$5,000 per horse. For example, if there are three violations in one trailer on three horses, the fine could be as much as \$45,000.





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## For Additional Information

If you have questions or need more information, contact

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